



Student: **Michael Higley-Vance**

THIS FORM MUST BE COMPLETELY FILLED IN

Follow these procedures: If requested by your instructor, please include an assignment cover sheet. This will become the first page of your assignment. In addition, your assignment header should include your last name, first initial, course code, dash, and assignment number. This should be left justified, with the page number right justified. For example:

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Save a copy of your assignments: You may need to re-submit an assignment at your instructor's request. Make sure you save your files in accessible location.

Academic integrity: All work submitted in each course must be your own original work. This includes all assignments, exams, term papers, and other projects required by your instructor. Knowingly submitting another person's work as your own, without properly citing the source of the work, is considered plagiarism. This will result in an unsatisfactory grade for the work submitted or for the entire course. It may also result in academic dismissal from the University.

EDU7001-8

Scott Ebbrecht

Advanced Scholarly Writing

EDU7001-1

No student concerns at this time.

Faculty Use Only

Michael, well, there is indeed good and bad writing ... however, in your case and this paper, I would have to say that you are a 'good' writer! Overall, I thought this was a quality first submission with respect to content and embedding citations to further support your suppositions from the readings. Please review for my specific comments and corrections to avoid in future submissions.

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You are off to a great start, indeed! Dr. E.

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Atrocious and Nebulous Discourse: An Analysis of the Supposition

(or more clearly)

Bad Writing: Criticisms, Common Mistakes, and Solutions

Michael Higley-Vance

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Bad Writing: Criticisms, Common Mistakes, and Solutions

Throughout history, atrocious and nebulous discourse has long been a part of scholarly writing. The title of this paper includes vocabulary that most people would say is, scholarly jargon only those with an expansive education would understand without a dictionary. Even I must admit coming up with the title took time, effort, and lots of vocabulary research. However, even Socrates is known to have used difficult and complicated language in his writings (Smith, 1999).

The ability to present ideas in writing deserves attention because of its importance to students for lifelong success in higher education and careers. When students can write and discuss what they read, think critically, and defend their positions, teachers get a clear picture of how well students understand and apply the knowledge. Critics of scholarly writing might say that complex writing distorts, confuses, and misleads the reader with words (Bad Blood, 1999; Smith, 1999). So why do scholars write in such a technical and obscure way and what influences their writing?

What writing looks and sounds like is a direct result of relaxed editing and what has come to be an accepted, yet distorted, view of scholarly writing. Professor Michael Berube of the University of Illinois, **believed** that bad writing is due to a lack of tough editing by academic journals to make writing clearer. Even when clear writing is found it can cause friction among scholarly circles (Bad Blood, 1999). In addition to editors, practitioners of difficult language

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have an even greater influence on a new generation of students. In an essay written by Edward Said, president of the Modern Language Association, he charges literature departments with promoting unintelligible writing (Smith, 1999, para. 3-4).

Scholarly encouragement of complex and difficult to understand writing is due to a movement away from a humanities approach to writing and adopting a more scientific approach. This has created an expectation that there is a need for scientific vocabulary (Smith, 1999). Using scientific vocabulary to explain non-scientific ideas and concepts results in obscure technical language that is hard to follow and understand. Denis Dutton, editor of *Philosophy and Literature* says, "In the sciences jargon is helpful because it uses simple terms to stand for complicated phenomena whereas in the humanities it's the opposite: people use complicated terms to express simple things" (Bad Blood, 1999, para. 14). However, there are those in the field who would disagree with Dutton like Larry Grossbert, communications professor at the University of North Carolina. Grossbert **believed** that there's a place for complex writing saying, "It's interesting that we expect scientists to have technical vocabulary, but when it comes to the most complex systems we know of – namely, human social existence – we somehow think we don't need a technical vocabulary to describe it" (Bad Blood, 1999, para. 13).

In an online newspaper, the San Gabriel Valley Tribune at www.sgvtribune.com, Robert Rector **provided** examples of bad writing in a post he submitted April 3, 2010. The post referenced several "bad writing" examples entered into the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction contest. The annual contest, which is sponsored by the English department at San José State University, helps bring awareness to "bad writing" (Rector, 2010). So what really defines bad academic writing and how can a writer overcome these mistakes?

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In order to understand what makes bad writing bad, it is important to know the characteristics of good writing. The practice of writing consists of a writing process and it's traits: ideas, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, organization, and conventions. The writing process, which is often divided into five stages, is used to draft, write, revise, edit, and share a student's thoughts and ideas. Most writers go back and forth through these stages before ever publishing their work. Successful academic discourse happens when the process and each one of the aforementioned traits is thoughtfully represented in a student's writing.

Writers can overcome common writing mistakes by paying close attention to the writing process and traits. Ideas must be clear, with supporting details, and consistently read throughout the paper. Showcasing the student's academic level and education should represent voice and style. Careful word choice should be consistent with the ideas and concepts of the paper. A scientific approach to writing can be easily adopted without using complex and difficult language. Using the right voice and word choice will help your sentences flow smoothly. Finally, organizing your ideas so that they seamlessly flow from one idea to the next and remembering to use appropriate grammar will all have a positive impact on a student's writing. Bad writing happens when attention to these traits is done overly well, leaving the reader confused and unclear about the writer's intended message.

Although there is much discourse on the topic of atrocious [extremely bad] and nebulous [unclear] writing and even contests where writers actually compete to see who writes the best badly it doesn't appear that scholarly writing will change any time soon. Too many scholars in the academia field, accordingly to Sanford Pinsker, an author, editor, and professor, "...have simply become the bad writers they set out to be" (Bad Blood, 1999, para. 17). The solution is for writers to allow themselves to be influenced less by practitioners of difficult language and

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influenced more by the process and traits of good quality scholarly writing (Smith, 1999). Ultimately it is the editor's responsibility to ensure that what is written is clear through "hard-nosed editing" as Berube asserts (Bad Blood, 1999, para. 19).

References

- Anonymous, (2010, April 03). Robert rector: Bad writing gets its just reward. *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.ncu.edu/docview/379815984?accountid=28180>
- Bad blood over bad writing: Critics say US academic language has become so convoluted that it is largely incomprehensible to the point where argument is becoming impossible. Richard Kelly reports. (1999, April 8). *Irish Times* [City Edition], p. 15. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/310535955?accountid=28180>
- Smith, D. (1999, February 27). When ideas get lost in bad writing. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/27/arts/when-ideas-get-lost-bad-writing-attacks-scholars-include-barbed-contest-with.html?ref=dinitiasmith>

